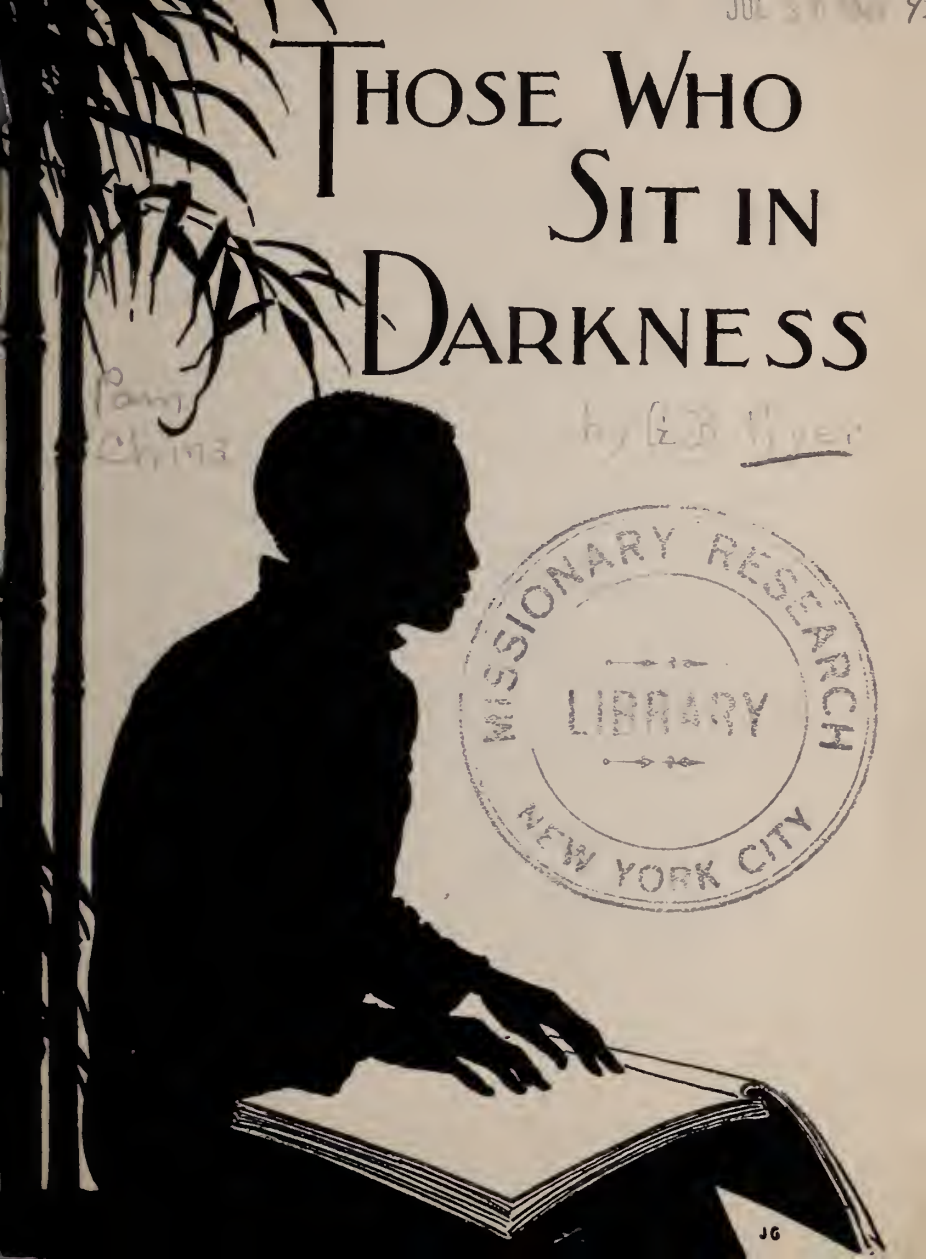
THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS



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Report

In 1931 representatives of twenty nations met in New York for a world conference on work for the Blind. It was then agreed that in 1941 reports should be submitted to the permanent secretary on progress made in each country during the ten year period.

War made it impossible for the majority of the nations represented to carry out this plan.

However, in spite of China's five year battle to defend her independence and democracy, the following report was received from George B. Fryer, superintendent of the Institution for the Chinese Blind in Shanghai. It tells of the growth of work for the Blind in China during the first half of the decade, then of the Japanese invasion, the tragic struggle for existence and the survival of only about sixteen schools. These have received their support, during the past year, chiefly from generous contributors through the American Committee of the Institution for the Chinese Blind, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

WORK FOR THE BLIND IN CHINA-1931-1941

GEORGE B. FRYER

WORK FOR THE EDUCATION and care of the blind in China has received such a setback during the past three years that it is almost impossible to give any concise statement or accurate information concerning it. A few schools and institutions have been completely destroyed, others have had to close their doors, some have followed the Grand Trek westward, while still others are carrying on as best they can under very trying and difficult circumstances. It will therefore be necessary for me to divide this report into two parts: the work until August, 1937, and, from that date to the present time.

Progress—1931—1937

Prior to the opening of the present hostilities in August, 1937, the work for the blind throughout China showed remarkable progress. This was partly due to the impetus received as a result of the World Conference for the Blind, but largely to constructive work by the Chinese themselves. The awakening of the leaders of China to the urgent need for health campaigns, for the care of underprivileged children, for the idea of personal service in caring for the less fortunate from the economic as well as from the humanitarian standpoint, and the gradual trend towards a higher standard of living through education and higher ideals. The foundations laid by the pioneer schools for the blind in showing what could and what should be done paved the way for the increasing demands for more schools and vocational training for the blind and an earnest attempt to make them self-supporting. The methods and standards of work for the blind had greatly improved in all the schools, new centers had been opened, and the public were becoming blind-minded and aroused to their responsibilities. In 1936 our own Institution gave twenty-nine exhibitions to more than

twelve thousand interested and enthusiastic spectators from all walks of life. Many schools report a like interest on the part of the public.

No census has been taken of the blind population in China, but there are no reasons for changing our original estimate of a million. About half of these are cared for by their friends, by their relatives, or by benevolent institutions. The other half are fortune tellers, musicians, story tellers, or beggars, all eking out their miserable existence to the best of their ability. The conditions, however, have distinctly improved owing to the constructive activities and educational success throughout the country which have raised the standard of living and enabled the blind to be considered as fellow human beings and not as outcasts unworthy of assistance or kindness. In a recent survey of the institutions and schools for the education and training of the blind, there were found to be thirty-eight centers with a total enrollment of 387 boys and 845 girls. The majority of these are given only a primary education and are then drafted into industrial work where they are able to earn at least a part of their living, while some are entirely self-supporting. The blind in China do not receive any special privileges or pensions,

but the Post Office does allow reduced rates of postage for packages or letters embossed in braille.

Education of the Blind

The progress in education has been quite pronounced. While the majority of schools give only an elementary education similar to that of ordinary seeing schools, a few have carried their pupils through the lower middle, or junior high school. A very few with special ability have attended schools or universities for the seeing, taking most of their work in English and graduating with the B.A. degree, sometimes with honors, from the university. One of these graduates, on account of his excellent record, left for America in July, 1940, where he has been generously given a scholarship by the New York Institution for the Education of the Blind. He is also attending Columbia University and hopes to receive the M.A. degree in June, returning to China to use his talents in assisting others who are blind. Another graduate took up the study of law and, after obtaining a special degree, undertook work in Singapore.

As in all other countries, music has a great attraction for the blind. Nearly all can play the

organ or other instruments. Several schools have a Chinese orchestra and three have brass bands which are in great demand in their communities. Chorus singing is an added attraction and enjoyed by all. Recently several blind pupils have studied the piano, and one from my institution passed his Senior Trinity College Examination with honors.

Physical Training and Hygiene

Physical training and hygiene have also made a great advance, but lack of funds and workers is very keenly felt. The Chinese blind can compete with the seeing, as was shown in an athletic meet in 1936 when twenty-six intermediate schools held a competition in Shanghai and the first prize, a silver shield, was awarded to the blind group.

Blind Girls trained as Evangelists

A number of blind girls are trained as evangelists and Bible workers and go among the hospitals and country people holding meetings and giving encouragement to the sufferers.

Trades and Crafts Taught to the Blind. in various Institutions throughout China

The various institutions for the blind in China teach over thirty different trades and make them

all a more or less paying business. Their methods are usually crude and very primitive, but many blind people are entirely self-supporting, and some workshops make a profit, one clearing, in 1936, some two thousand dollars above expenses. Not all trades are possible all over China, but certain districts specialize where raw material is easily obtainable and a market assured. The following is a list of trades showing the number of schools in which they are taught:

Knitting, wool and cotton (18)

Rattan work, furniture and baskets (12)

Cloth-weaving, hand looms, cotton (7), wool (2), silk (1), grass cloth (1)

Towel-weaving (4), including Turkish and Greek face and bath towels, huckaback plain bathmats, etc.

Other weaving: hospital gauze (2), bandage cloth (2), curtain gauze (2), rugs (2), mats (2), braid (1)

Grass matting (3), straw mats and matting (2), coir matting (2)

Bamboo ware (4)

Massage (2)

Lacemaking (2)

String & rope (2)

Shoemaking (2)

House work (4)

Sewing (3)
Spinning (1)
Brushmaking (2)
Hospital Bible women and Evangelists trained (5)
Envelopes (1)
Netting (2)
Stereotyping and braille printing (3)
Dictaphone and typing (1).

All over China there are regular schools for fortune telling. Thousands of blind are engaged in this profession, from which they derive good incomes. Several of our graduates have taken up this work, and a few make a net profit of nearly one thousand dollars per month, Shanghai currency. There are also schools for musicians, story tellers, and beggars; all must make a living somehow. Others are engaged as laborers, "earning their bread by the sweat of their brow."

Publications on Work for the Blind

There have been no important publications on the work for the blind in China during the past ten years. Each institution has, however, issued its annual reports which are extremely interesting. The Ming Sum School in Canton issued a booklet on the occasion of its Fiftieth Jubilee in 1938. A *Directory of the Schools for the Blind* was issued by

this Institution in 1936. I gave a course of lectures at one of the Chinese universities in 1935-36 on the care and education of the blind and had intended to publish these in book form, but the manuscript was lost during the hostilities. I have published ten pamphlets in Chinese on the care of the eyes and on matters pertaining to the blind and have distributed several thousand throughout China. A number of books have been published in Chinese Braille and a weekly, a monthly, and a quarterly magazine were published but have had to cease owing to the hostilities.

Progress in the Prevention of Blindness

Great interest has been shown in prevention work. The various hospitals and clinics throughout China have done yeoman work saving hundreds of eyes. The matter took concrete form after the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Mather. Madam Chiang Kai-shek was chairman of a committee of noted physicians and others, who were just organizing the work when they had to disband in 1937. The number of blind children in China is evidently decidedly on the decrease. The demand for vaccination, the introduction of hygiene and sanitation, the work done by hospitals and clinics,

the enforcement of eye clinic work, and education in the various schools have all contributed to eliminate ignorance, superstition, and prejudice which augurs well for the future.

August 1937—January 1941

The institutions and schools for the blind have suffered very severely for the past three and a half years, especially those in the war zone. The government schools in the occupied areas have all had to disband or have followed the Grand Trek westward. The foreign-owned and managed schools have been through very trying times. The first one was the Institution for the Chinese Blind in Shanghai. With the sudden veering of fighting to that district, it was necessary to evacuate everybody. Students and staff spent three years in overcrowded, though safe, quarters in the Settlement, part of the time with no funds and but little food, comforts, or equipment. The school buildings were in the direct line of fire, and thirty-five shells tore their way through the walls and roofs of the twelve buildings. The premises were afterwards occupied by troops, and, when we were able to return, we found the furniture and equipment badly damaged or missing. Now the buildings have all been re-

paired, through the generosity of American friends, the equipment is being repaired, all have moved back, and work has begun once more. We now have a blind population of over a hundred, but it will be some time before we can return to our normal condition and standard of work.

Some China Schools Suffered Less but have no Funds

Schools in Fukien Province, South China, and Peiping seem to have suffered little damage but have fewer pupils and uncertain funds.

Two Schools Reopen in New Locations

The Hankow Boys' School had to be disbanded entirely but has since opened with twenty-six blind boys, across the River. The Wuchang Girls' School also closed but has reopened in different premises.

Changsha Girls' School Badly Damaged

The Changsha Girls' School had to evacuate. One building was destroyed, and others damaged, and equipment was lost. They will not be able to return for some time.

River Boats Sheltered Students

The Ming Sum School at Canton had to evacuate, and the girls lived in small boats on the river. Buildings and equipment were not damaged, and work is now being carried on as usual.

Kunming Girls' School Entirely Destroyed

The Girls' School in Kunming, Yunnan, was completely destroyed by bombs last October. In a letter Miss Anna Muller writes:

"It was difficult to get in. The neighbor's house had fallen onto our wall and broken it, the rafters hanging over. The sight of our place nearly broke our hearts, for there were three big craters on our compound. One part of the building had completely disappeared. The other rooms, with furniture, bedding, clothes, and all the equipment for the blind was mixed up with debris. What had taken eight years to build up was a total wreck within a few minutes. . . . Words fail to describe our feelings. No place for the girls to study or work, materials all gone, not one single room left, part of the buildings completely gone, even the dentristry all in ruins. . . . The only thing we could be glad about was that none of the Mission Sisters or the children were hurt. This was the first time that no one was in the house. . . .

The girls are doing knitting, and the little ones are studying, but the work here is very much disturbed by alarms."

Courage and Determination of Superintendents

I have not been able to get word from several interior schools, but those I have heard from and whose buildings were not damaged are carrying on as best they can with meager funds and in spite of untold difficulties. This is all a very sad story, and I have omitted the pathetic details, but it shows the indomitable will and the Christian love and courage of the superintendents and workers. They are surely worthy of our highest praise and commendation.

A Dark Picture with a Note of Hope

The immediate future is certainly very black for most of us; but we feel that when these hostilities are over, the work for the blind will go ahead by leaps and bounds, and the million blind of China will come into their rightful heritage and will become respected citizens of this vast country.

THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE OF THE INSTITUTION FOR THE CHINESE BLIND, Inc. (U.S.A.)

Chartered "to ameliorate the condition of the deaf, mute and blind in China."

Since early 1941 the American Committee has sent to China the amounts indicated:

Institution for the Chinese Blind, Shanghai	$ 2,000.
Institution for the Chinese Blind—Department for the Deaf	250.
Ming Do School for Blind Girls, Foochow, Fukien	2,000.
Church Mission School for Blind Boys, Foochow, Fukien	1,000.
David Hill School for the Blind, Hankow, Hupeh	500.
60 Destitute Blind, Shanghai, Kiangsu	500.
Hill-Murray Institution for the Blind, Peiping, Hopeh	500.
Kunghsien School for the Blind, Kunghsien, Hupeh	1,000.
300 Blinded Soldiers, Chihkiang, Hunan	1,000.
The Blind Girls School, Kunming, Yunnan	2,000.
School for the Blind and Deaf, Chengtu	500.
Girls Blind School, Changsha	300.
Presbyterian Ming Sum School, Canton	1,500.
School for the Deaf, Chefoo, China	500.
Home for the Blind, Hinghwa, Fukien	100.
	$13,650.
June 12th, 1942, to be divided among the various schools in unoccupied China	5,400.
June 12th, 1942, for work with blinded soldiers in Luchow, Szechuan Province	6,000.
	$25,050.

THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE OF THE INSTITUTION FOR THE CHINESE BLIND, Inc. U.S.A.

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